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THE AMERICAN COLONY IN PARIS

IN 1867.

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FROM THE FRENCH OF ANDRE LEO.



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WHEN you pass through the Champs Elysées from the Place de la Concorde up to the Arc d'Etoile, or throughout the whole quartier of St. Honoré, towards the Monceaux Park, you often meet women richly dressed, light-haired men, young girls with a quick and decided step, lovely curly-haired children, in whose faces you can see both candor and self-possession. All these persons, either apart or together, have the same expression; strong faces, piercing eyes, matured character apparently, and countenances expressive, agreeable, and often handsome. They have nothing of English coarseness, though apparently of the same type, yet with a demeanor much more fresh and unartificial. Such are Americans living in Paris, perhaps making a home there or living at some hotel.

Every nationality meets in the Bois de Boulogne and its fine avenues, but there is an evident preponderance of the English and American customs and language, for the signs on the shops even tell us this. Even if the same language and way of life unite the English and Americans in parts of Paris, here it ends, for the Anglo-phobia as a national sentiment is more lively in the United States than in France. It is by tens of thousands that we can count Americans in Paris this year, and at all times they form quite a large society, composed of two elements,—one the more active, the

other stationary; one, only the visitor, the other to remain for a year or two or more. There are even a certain number of Americans acclimated as to a second native land, and connected for the most part with French families; this stationary portion is composed of bankers, diplomats, and families come for the education of their children, or artists to study in our collections. The American is accused of want of artistic taste. This judgment is over-hasty, when we remember that they are new people occupied with toil and industry. The American artist claims it, and already his effort and ambition show the development of this precious instinct, which exists in all people, but which requires leisure and education. What we may expect of American art, we can judge this year, as many of the American artists have sent their works to the Exhibition. We may mention Woodberry Langdon, of French origin; May, author of a beautiful King Lear; Rogers, whose patriotic groups of sculpture give us the heroes and deeds of the late war; while Hill unrolls for us the stupendous scenery of California. In the French School of painting, the Americans arrayed by our "*rapins*" among the class of "*epicieres*" of the age, seek in preference "genre" pictures. Couture is one of their prime favorites, and a Yankee has recently bought one of his pictures, less *epicier* than malicious. Judge of it yourself: it is

of a courtesan guiding her chariot to which are attached bankers, diplomats, and other noted men who form the élite. To carry this cruel satire upon the Old World to the New, is hardly generous. O Yankees, must we send our artists to Washington?

The favorite quarter for Americans is the Grand Hotel on the Boulevard Italiens, which, from its central position, and its interior arrangements for luxury and comfort, enjoys a colossal reputation on the other side of the ocean. The American starts from New York for this hotel. It is there he lands, there he wakes up, gets information, according to his means or projects, and either settles himself there, or goes to some other hotel or boarding-house, or hires an apartment and keeps house. Enter the court, go upstairs and take your stand in the large reading-room opposite the chief entrance. Every moment the carriages which come and go, contain ten Americans to one Englishman or foreigner. From the hotel the traveller finds his way easily to all points, wherever necessity or curiosity calls him. The first visit is to his bankers, Rue de la Paix, to Bowles & Drivet, Rue Scribe, Tucker, Munroe, perhaps to Norton, Rue Auber.

Since the war the Rothschilds may wonder what has become of their excellent clients,—Americaus. Gone, Mr. Rothschild; the sympathy between the banker and the planter were too evident for the North to be without any grudge; and as for your Southern patrons, *they* have vanished along with their fortunes. It was the North in old times—more enterprising and greater travellers—who came to Paris. It is not always well, Mr. Rothschild, to heed too much private preferences or prejudices,

and a banker of this age should show a certain modesty of opinion. The office of an American banker is a place where one sees and is seen; you find there all the newspapers, and learn, above all, the first and most important news,—*the rate of gold*. To-day, you pay \$1.35 currency for \$1.00 gold,—not as bad as it was,—for, during the war, he who wished to spend a thousand francs in Paris, must receive three thousand in paper; economy ruled (for once.—*Trans.*). Anon comes a more favorable breeze, under whose influence the breadths of satin and the cashmeres expand again from the hands of Laure, Oude, & Leroy; the jewellers of the Rue de la Paix receive anew their former visitors, and one may dream of splendid toilettes and enjoy them; the numbers of soirées are redoubled, and the world of society revives with renewed life and vigor.

As soon as the feminine part, which rule in numbers as well as influence in the Colony, arrive in Paris, they hasten to realize, at prices relatively cheap, the Paris fashions, that the Custom House at home has made so very dear. They run to Lucy Hoquet, Alexandrine, order dresses of Vignons, Wolffs, at Rogets. Dressed at last in the richest and newest toilettes, they order a carriage for the Bois, run to the opera, to the Italiens, and the theatres, and to the embassy to put their names down for presentation at court, and order a court dress at once. These republicans,—I will tell you in confidence, and you will see it everywhere in this regard,—these republicans are very fond of wordly pomp, and have not the prejudices against monarchies that we have. Does this astonish you? Consider a moment; their opinions are so disinterested! Monarchs belonging to others do not alarm them; they are trav-

ellers who wish *to see everything* and wish upon their return home to say that they have been presented, and would feel humiliated not to have that privilege; having come to see the curiosities of Europe, ought they to neglect the greatest to an inhabitant of the New World? The ardor with which they follow it up is explained by the frequent shifting of scene upon the stage of our epoch. Are they sure to find again the theatre lighted, and the same actors on the stage? Each month the ambassador from the United States is obliged, upon a simple request, to present a batch of some hundred of his countrymen. Why not? Neither serfs nor seigneurs, they are all Americans; preferences are not allowed, otherwise the minister would not know on what to rely.

These foreign democrats have not renounced their power, and are not without influence in the choice of their agents. Look you how this usurping democracy penetrates into the sanctuaries of aristocracy! A certain number of them are acclimated to the splendors of a court; and at Paris especially many are guests at imperial residences. There are some young persons whose fearless eccentricities make even those born on the borders of the Danube grow pale, and whose intrepidity, the roles lesmoins voilés of the stage would not abash. But we must not listen to this malicious chronicler, who, American or not, has for his only country—the world; otherwise we should be obliged to speak of the lowness of the American corsage. At first this fashion, along with the Bible and other customs, was of pure English tradition; and there is one extenuating circumstance to bring forward: it is, that the waves of the ocean bring us shoulders far more beautiful than those of the British Channel. Such a matter of detail is not so

very characteristic, we must confess; nor the duty of the compatriots of our Parisian ladies to moot it.

The salons of the American minister are naturally the central point of American society in Paris. Mr. and Mrs. Bigelow formerly *received* every Wednesday in the daytime, but gave *soirées* very irregularly, and by invitation; this was not thought enough by the Colony. General Dix, besides his weekly reception in the daytime, is at home every Saturday evening. The tone of these reunions is less solemn but more frigid than our own. The necessity of an introduction, in order to address a person, is as rigid in this republican circle as in England; and yet the American manners and conversation have an exterior of frankness and “*laissez aller*,” with perhaps a little coarseness. Some Americans beg not to be judged en masse in Paris; from the corners of their lips plays one of those smiles which we call “*Saint Germain*;” and at the same time with a certain intonation and provincial style the word “shoddy” slips from their tongues. This word, almost untranslatable, means this, as near as may be: “Money being the sinews of travel, those citizens of the Union who come to Paris, ought to be, and are in general, the rich, not rich after European fashion; that is to say, aristocratic in manners and education. In America the incessant labor of the triple furnace of commerce, industry, and speculation, if it produces enormously, preserves but little; but the rich in America, if veritably enriched, are the same as the rare known the world over. Moreover all refinement has its scoriae.” Such is the social and economical fact to which the disdainful smile and contumacious word have reference. Where does aristocracy not exist?

Assuredly not among Americans in Paris is the word tabooed. If you wish a presentation at the embassy, or the entrée to their salons, let the wealth come from Petroleum or Shoddy, do not forget your ancestry. One of my literary friends, a man honorably known, was much surprised, on reading his letter of introduction, to find himself less recommended for himself than for his grandfather,—a local distinction which signifies as little as possible in the United States. This is not a singular instance; it arises from a law, more human than national, which consists in prizing what we do not possess. Americans, a people without ancestry, and almost always parvenus, hold naturally in great esteem the distinction of race. Some boast a descent from the first founders of the colonies and get laughed at. Virginia, colonized by the cavalier partisans of the Stuarts, is the State where they make the greatest pretensions to nobility; and the sacramental phrase for all Virginians is, "belonging to the first families;" a malicious joker adds, "No one ever saw the *second*." As for titles, if you have one, do not drop it; once made known, it will never be forgotten. A title will bring you sweet smiles, and make a decided difference in your favor when weighing your merits, if you have any wish to contract a marriage with these transatlantic beauties with their Californian wealth. These young republicans find that even a ducal coronet suits à merveille their blonde hair, and "Madame la Comtesse," a most charming complement to their elegant toilettes. There have been a number of alliances between the France of other days and the America of to-day; and the world is talking of such a marriage at this moment, which, to the great scandal of the *Colony*, was to be arranged after the

French custom of intermediate parties. Do you not see that, aristocratic as these noble Americans wish to appear, they cling to their prejudices, and cannot comprehend a marriage brought about other than by mutual acquaintance and appreciation?

Our indiscreet chronicler tells us that among these trailing dresses of satin and velvet, which fill the carriages at the Bois, ornament our Boulevards, or sweep majestically the salons of the Rue de Presbourg, or even the Tuileries, there are some which come from the oil regions. What of it? And if it is looked upon askance in a democratic country, as is perhaps natural, in our eyes at Paris such oil does not spot. We only wish to convey the idea, that if in the commercial whirlpool of New York, or the oil regions, or the mines at the West, any one has made a good haul to his net, directly the young ladies are excited with the desire to see Europe, and they are off. Every American has a wish in the course of his life to see the Old World. Some affect to despise this old country; but it is, after all, the land of their ancestry, the chain which connects this new people to human traditions. However promising the future, the need is felt of a past. Despite their wealth and their liberty, everything came from Europe,—religion, literature, laws, science, arts, souvenirs, and even the blood in their veins.

An immense number of books and papers are published in the United States; yet the foundation of every good library is English and French classics, and all those who in this rising civilization belong to the world of letters have their eyes turned to the East. In truth, London and Paris are to the New World what Athens and Rome were to us in the times of the Renaissance. It may be said, without invidious compari-

son, that however dazzling may be the progress of the New World, however humiliating our backslidings, we still believe in the immortal vitality of all peoples, and we do not believe in the preconceived plan of History, nor its eternal plagiarisms. Individual right has severed at a blow the theocratie, aristocratie, and monarchieal circle, where the old Clio drove her chariot and the two extremes severed find their sap flow on ad infinitum.

As for the families settled in Paris for the education of their children, music and French are their first object. The education of an American girl appears to be very complex; that of the boys much less so, for, in general, having his own fortune to make, he throws himself at once into the commercial arena. But the young ladies, whether they are destined to be teachers or that they study merely for mental improvement, follow studies which we regard as rather pedantic; they are the women who study Latin, Algebra, or Geometry, and even undertake without fear the sciences. Look at them and be reassured! The care of their toilettes has not suffered, and the accusation of brusqueness, so often made against learned women, falls to the ground before the display of their luxurious frivolity. See if the waves of silk, gauze, and lace, which surround them, are in less profusion, and if the details of their dresses are less scientifically feminine or the ensemble less fresh. It would be more difficult to discover if the interior erudition was of the same force, and what amount of genuine capacity the samples displayed conceal; but one fact is undisputed, in an inverse sense, the superiority of the women to the men in the New World. While, usually, at the age of fourteen, the young American boy ceases to study, and enters

the office of his father or other merchant, the young girl pursues her studies, improves herself by teaching, and, married or single, has many hours for study.

All those who know American domestic life speak of reading as one of the principal occupations. We see them crowd to literary and scientific lectures, but we reproach them for not asserting this superiority in matters of dignity as well as independence. The theory which makes of woman a queen in chains, governing by grace and charm, is in full sway the other side of the ocean. The first pride and duty of an American husband is to insure idleness for his wife and sufficient money for her toilette. Many women in America are occupied in teaching, or in the service of the State, etc., chiefly unmarried,—a not uncommon thing in New England, which vies with the Old World in excess of female population. When they marry, they resign at once their positions. "I shall not allow my wife to work" is an expression of masculine pride, which really expresses dependence. Save an emancipation party formed under the inspiration of Miss Stanton, American women certainly accept their position with fortitude, like spoiled children, and, full as worldly as other nationalities, do not seek to exceed them in aught but luxury, of which they are passionately fond. In spite of the charming liberty which young people have, to make themselves seen and known, we fear very much that pure love, free from the luxury of an establishment and all the finery of a wedding outfit has not yet gained in any land letters of naturalization.

American manners, we all know, give to young girls the most entire liberty. Having the entire charge of their virtue and

interests, being taught the dangers of life, they are capable of braving them; but we must concede this task is easy for them, thanks to the respect with which men surround them. A young *lady* can travel from one end of the Union to the other, without fear of dishonorable pursuit, or even the least rudeness. An American girl is easily distinguished from a French one by her general appearance: her dress is more *degagée*. They were the first to adopt masculine hats, worn far on the forehead, leaving exposed large masses of hair, by which in truth, we cannot, more than any one else of our time, verify, either race or nationality. They cheerfully wear their skirts short and of fanciful cut, loaded down with ornaments of jet, and appear in high boots, while "*suivez moi*" of all colors float from their necks. If they are devoid of those timid graces which we expect to see in our young ladies, they have, by way of compensation — liberty. Utterly self-reliant, they walk as daughters of a conquering race, who have made themselves a place under the sun; and if this trait sometimes extends — as the slander says — to arrogance, you know an excess of this obtains more or less everywhere. This self-possession, assurance, if you will, is owing to the admirable conduct of their men. Why should they not go straight onward when they know their path is clear wherever they deign to put their tiny feet?

However, things have so little equilibrium in our worlds (were they new), that, in virtue of the above system, it is the man whose reputation and safety is in peril through the unpunishable onslaught of a weakness too carefully protected. How many soft looks attract him! till he allows himself to be charmed by these delicious smiles, and, forgetting himself, in

such an attractive intercourse, wakes to an expiation or marriage sanctioned by all the tribunals in the Union, if need be. But, in truth, to the eyes of Americans Paris must seem a world upside-down. They and others complain very much of the little security and respect yielded to women among us; of the intrigues of the French, and the indulgence of opinion for this "*hanging matter*." They are quite right. The most certain mark of dignity in a people is the respect they have for their own nature, according to the conditions of their life. Love is license, wherever liberty is dead, that is to say, respect for one's self; and despite the terror of those who bring virtue to this plight, to this *ncagation*, — the impossibility to do amiss, — true chastity has liberty for her sister. The American mothers are very much scandalized at many other things in Paris, for they seem to have the firm opinion, that, in marriage-union, no other third party, except a child, ought to be admitted. Young girls, on their side, are both astonished and indignant at the strict watch to which French girls submit. In spite of themselves, they have thought it best to make some concessions on this point, and allow themselves to be attended by a maid, when they go out without their parents. Strange pledge of security! and made to give a very sad idea of our manners. But, O young ladies! — you, born in a land where the monarchical influences have never germinated, — why do you submit to these shameful systems of "*espionage*"? Would it not be better for you to give us the example of your disdain for them, and teach our ladies the manners of genuine liberty? Paris, after all, is not a forest, and a look of disdain, or a shrug of the shoulders, silence itself, might fain suffice

to make a too artistic idler or impudent *Gandin*, ashamed of his enterprise.

Is it then true that, for want of other tyranny, the regard for opinion, whatever it may be, in America, is a burden? I am assured that for this temporary submission, young American girls, once in America again, and having therefore regained their lost liberty, do not care to return again to Paris. At home, they come and go at their own sweet will, meet young men familiarly, flirt with them with great furore, and walk with them without rendering account to any one of time or actions, being *absolute* at home. Even at Paris; in this latter particular, they only save appearances, for the more the child grows, the more she proclaims her independence, extends it, fosters it. The elder sister assumes the right of a mother over a younger, and, as the young star rises in the zenith, the mother fades away and sets. Another extreme without doubt. But this people, a new stem in a new soil, grows with the vigor of youth and a future; here is its originality and its strength.

Whilst young American girls are little pleased with a life in Paris, it is not so with the young men. Why this difference? For many reasons apropos to their nature and peculiar nationality and humanity in general. Remember, that in the United States, if we regard the nature of man and woman in the same manner as with us, the deductions drawn from this idea are utterly different. Here, weakness is delivered up to force; there . . . the contrary, or nearly so. In America, seduction is, in fact, a *crime*, and punished and despised; in France, an amiable *vice*, and made a boast of. Now, whatever the relations of a people to their institutions, we

cannot deny the force of example, of occasion, and those ferments in human nature, in its infusorial state, always ready to generate, under favorable auspices, their unhealthy creations. In fine, art, the opera, the ballet . . . Paris offers so many beauties and pleasures!

If you wish to dine with the dollars of the Union, go to Peters', but the pleasure will cost you dear; or to Phillippe's, where the more economical and knowing drink the best wine and eat the produce of the Halles Centrales; or to the Brewery, if you want a crowd. If you crave a national dish, go to Rue Godot-de-Maury and eat "buckwheats" at Charley's. Though they like French cooking, certain habits are always dear to Americans. Potatoes and rice take very much the place of bread at their tables; and when some of their family at home send them a barrel of flour from the West, the house-keeper sets at once to work, and they soon taste again most excellent pies, cake, and pudding, with all the affection that the sensations of the stomach can add to the emotions of the soul.

As we are on the subject of house-keeping (though since the days of Louis XIV. the French find little poetry in it), with the American it is an essential element in daily life. We call attention to the protests which they have raised this year in the Colony against the high prices in Paris, and, above all, against Parisian servants; the two questions are one and enough to complain of. We should have little faith in the scandal, had we not been told that families have been fairly driven from their own firesides, by the manners and exactions of our servants, to seek a so-called placee "to board." We wait with

patience for our transatlantic friends to solve this, for us, abstruse problem, which comes nearer and nearer to a forced solution, that we are the worst served of people, and that the dishonesty of our cooks and gandins should call down on our Babylon the anathemas of the biblical heavens! Perhaps the evil may arise from the opinion, generally given out in Paris, that Americans value things only according to their dearness. If any one asks you the best shop for this or that, think of the dearest, and answer accordingly; and if you recommend a poor professor to them, warn him not to ask a reasonable priece if he wants a situation. Good Americans! do not the Parisians know your faneies and serve you accordingly? In the poor little tradesman who wheels his wagon on the street, there is the embryo philosopher or diplomat. His eye has taken your measure from head to foot, and his priece is adjusted to your taste and fortune; your nationality, your pretensions, your manners, and eharaeter are fathomed at a glance; a cosmopolitan, he will entice you into his net, by pity, persuasion, effrontry, or the fear of his jests, or the need of his esteem. He will do for a sou loyally, what the tradesman in blaek, with whom you deal, will do for franes, but with more banalité.

Whatever may be the inconvenienees of the French capital, it is a well-known proverb, "When good Americans die, they come to life again in Paris." Can there be anything more touching, energetic, or flattering to us? But, joking aside, coming from a religious people, it seems to us terribly heretical. What, Paris for Paradise as the abode of the just! Confusion for beatitudes! Theatres for contempla-

tions! Operas for canticles of the redeemed! O ye Americans of Paris! what has become of your Christian spirit?

Do not let us go too far on the authority of this proverb (we think it certainly *far enough*.—*Trans.*); for if you have the misfortune not to belong to any of the religious sects duly constituted in this age so full of faiths, you must take care not to reveal the fact in any of the salons of American society. Be a Jew, above all if you be a Baron; be a Mahomedan; no matter how small a part you contribute to the diplomatic corps, you will be well received. Choose one of the thousand sects which meander in and out of Protestantism; there are some better than others, but there will be no objection to your choiee. Only have an *idol*; otherwise you will pass for a person, not dangerous precisely (for they are afraid of nothing in Ameriea), but immoral or *inconvenient*, which is worse. This exaction, if truly American, is characteristic of the race the world over. It belongs to the habit of human thought to confound the word with the thing, and to hold true believers destitute of ideal, who, distrustful of themselves, but with faith in the unknown, do not worship infallibly what they have themselves originated. It is now seven or eight years since the American Colony founded its religion at Paris, by the erection of a chapel in the Rue de Berri. Before that they met in the Rue de la Paix. The funds necessary were furnished by gifts and subscriptions; for Americans are fervent enough in paying for their religious services and ask naught of the State. They say the dread, among certain French Catholics, of a separation of Church and State astound them. "Ha! what," they say, "are these the people who

are so ready to accuse us of looking only at the main chance,—‘the almighty dollar,’—and yet are capable of allowing *their* priests to starve, and their faith to perish, sooner than put their hands in *their* pockets?” And at this they shake their heads with a scandalized air, expressing great doubts as to the future of the Romish Faith and Church. This is thought by Protestants who are firm enough in *their* convictions to carry their gifts to an unaccountable number of francs. The American Chapel has a wide nave, supported by columns of red marble, at the end of which is a pulpit; this space is filled with benches, the rent of which is the principal source of revenue. There is a notice in each pew to this effect. A choir of fresh, young voices alternate with the prayers. Dr. Eldridge, the minister, is a Presbyterian, but uses the English liturgy. Here is the reason for this singular fact so little in accordance with the ecclesiastical custom, of a country where sects flourish like weeds. Americans in Paris are of every denomination, and the idea of building separate chapels is out of the question. There was but one way,—to unite, through mutual concessions. Before this enterprise of making the genius of controversy submit to a plain necessity, would not the most audacious of the Old World draw back? The American does not hesitate, makes the attempt, and, what is more, generally succeeds. Sects in America live in tolerable harmony; they divide into families, and exchange pulpits. Two sects alone live outside this fraternal union,—the Episcopalians and the Unitarians,—that is to say, the disciples of the *definite* and *indefinite* dogma; the one built of solid blocks of granite, the other of mists and shadows. Unitarians were not taken into

account in the building of the American Chapel, and thought to join the rich, numerous, and influential Episcopalians. Faithful to their traditions, the Episcopalian makes them no more welcome than the Romish Church. It was the Presbyterian, who must accept the Book of Common Prayer-charter of the non-liberties of the English Church, and edited with care by James I., so well fitted to regulate the affairs of heaven and earth. This book contains the principal Romish prayers, the Credo, Gloria in Excelsis; only you find the word “Roman” excerpted before “Church.” Finally the Presbyterians must dress in a black gown. The Episcopalians alone refuse to lend their pulpits; and neither the waves of the ocean or the channel can efface the primitive baptism of the Tiber. They have just built a church (they reject the word chapel) in the Rue Bayard. Many continue to worship still in the “ehapel” for convenience’ sake. Motives purely divine are ever rare on our poor earth!

To conclude: the American reads first the newspapers at his banker’s, or at the Grand Hotel, also a French democratic paper,—generally the “Opinion Nationale,”—and some current literature (the women more we fancy of the latter.—*Trans*). An American newspaper in Paris is talked of.

And now your friendly chronicler, O citizens of the Union! asks pardon if, in his summary of your characteristics, he has not always leaned to the flattering side. He is not ignorant that you do not like scrutiny, and that you have harsh words for him who does not find everything with and among you *the best in the best possible country*. You accept with modesty hymns of praise and acknowledgments of your

superiority to old Europe; pray remember here you are described in miniature. Your hospitality, audacity, your liberty, enterprise, and immense works are left behind you at home. What you *do* bring to Paris, above all, are the pretensions of your infant aristocracy; and although your chronicler has met among you warm hearts

and cultivated minds who appreciate *all* countries, he cannot find in your idlers the great motive-power of your race. The time is not yet, according to his opinion, to salute you as the realization of our dogmas still discussed, and as the only bold and arch-inventors of "Go ahead!"



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$$\therefore 144 \overline{)144}$$



